Interesting Chat and Stage Gossip for Playgoers

Samuel L. Rothapfel, Father Of "New Order" in Photoplay Presentation, Sees New Era

The father of the new order of motion picture presentation, Samuel L. Rothapfel, is too modest a man, one might think, for his own good. At any rate, the new executive head of the Capitol Theater will tell you so little of how he has come to be known as the pioneer in photoplay advancement in New York City that unless you sit and ask him question after question you will know as little about his art (and surely it is an art) as you did when you entered his office on the second floor of the theater building.

"I cannot sleep or eat or shave or walk," he will admit, smilingly, "without thinking of it. I love it. I live it. It is almost an obsession with me."

And in those few words, no doubt, he has sized up the situation precisely. For he does live his work, and every hour of the day, he is on hand at the great theater directing his more than 400 employees in the way in which they should receive and care for the public, and his artists back stage and in the orchestra pit as to how they should entertain the public.

Mr. Rothapfel is the father of this "new order," indeed. All other motion picture theater heads in New York, or, at least, most of them, who to-day are attempting to follow in his footsteps in giving the public programs of high merit, both from a picture and musical standpoint, are his pupils. They have been graduated from his school.

Mr. Rothapfel is a strong proponent of the theory that the American audience doesn't like too much of the same thing.

"It isn't necessary to give the people a bill made up entirely of celluloid," he says. "And so I have an orchestra of seventy pieces, playing Herbert's works and operatic selections, and while the orchestra is playing them, I show the scenes on the stage behind the orchestra, both on films and in person!"

Walking up into the wide balcony from which the huge theater stretches away, it appears, into many, many city blocks, instead of just one, one sees at a glance that somebody certainly has his fingers upon the guide strings of that great organization, else it could not run so smoothly, so quietly and so beautifully as it does.

The ushers at the Capitol are drilled each day, in something like military style. An usher, approaching a captain of ushers, does everything but salute. He stands at attention as he speaks to the captain, and when he has finished talking he turns snappily, right about, and proceeds back to his post. It actualy takes one back to camp life, save for the fact that the "soldiers" of Camp Capitol tread Oriental rugs and plush and marble instead of weeds and dust.

Mr. Rothapfel walks across the brass-railed, marble-walled balcony foyer, and an usher sees him coming. No colonel in the army ever commanded more rigid attention from a private than the house manager does from his ushers.

"And that isn't only for me," Mr. Rothapfel says. "Watch."

And the uniformed boy, seeing a patron approach, draws his arms, palms against his trousers seams, to his side, and stands at rigid attention until the patron has passed. It does not take a word from the patron for the usher to be at his or her side, ready to be of assistance.

"I want our boys to know by the looks on the faces of the people whether they are satisfied and comfortable," the manager said.

There is a completely equipped hospital room, run by a trained nurse in her white linen, open all through the day and night, and there are facilities for doing such difficult work as setting a fracture. There are all kinds of medicines in chests, and an operating table. There are on an average of three cases a day of slight illnesses cared for in this miniature hospital on the second floor, just off the main foyer.

It will be seen that the theater, accommodating more than seven thousand persons as it does, sometimes has a fair sized little city within its walls, and three cases of illness a day are not many for a city of that size.

In case there is illness the ushers and maids and the nurse go to the afflicted one, without noise, without commotion, and gently take him or her to the little white room up stairs, administer the proper medicines, and that is all.

And as for panics, there is an interesting system in vogue at the Capitol, worked out under Mr. Rothapfel's direction. The only danger that confronts the management of such a large theater, he says, is possible panic. The building is fireproof, and in case of a possible blaze the ushers and firemen of the theater are so thoroughly trained that no injury reasonably should result. But in case of a rush of the thousands from the theater, of course, there could be serious injury.

If there should be an accident of any kind in the Capitol Theater, those who become frightened and start to run would see on all sides of them, standing in the exits, above which are red lights, the uniformed ushers—standing rigidly, their mouths open, repeating over and over again these words:

"Please walk! Don't run! This is an exit!"

The boys go through this drill every day, and it is believed by Mr. Rothapfel that with the warning there would be little chance for a stampede.

"The boys are to shout that cry at the top of their voices, and are not to be discourteous even in case of emergency," he says.

Did you ever wonder just what fills up all that office space around the outside of the great auditorium of the Capitol? Well, it is an interesting place. There are rows upon rows of offices, secretaries, private film projecting rooms where Mr. Rothapfel may see his pictures before he contracts for them, small rooms where hundreds upon hundreds of copies of music are stored for future use, mechanics' workrooms, film operators' quarters, advertising offices and the heads of all of the different departments necessary to make a success of this big institution.

It is apparent as one walks through the long, softly lighted hallways beside Mr. Rothapfel that he holds the pulse of that great working force and knows each minute just what is going on on the floor below him or behind the door through which he presently will take you. He tells you what his men are doing in the office at the end of the hallway, and then opens the door and you see them doing exactly what he said they were doing.

Sitting down in the loge section of the theater, directly in front of the great curtain, yet a full half city block away from it, in the very best seats the Capitol affords, Mr. Rothapfel listened a few minutes to the choral work of the groups of young men and young women seated at either end of the orchestra down below. Presently a uniformed usher came beside him, leaned over and said:

"Pardon me, sir, but are you one of the officials of this theater?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Rothapfel, somewhat taken back.

"Thank you, sir, I did not know, and wanted to be sure. I did not see your ticket."

And then the director smiled as the boy left and said:

"You see. They're not offensive even when they think you've slipped in here on an orchestra seat ticket."

And this same atmosphere of cordiality and courtesy pervades the theater from the box office out on Broadway to the alleyway back of the great stage.

The arrangements of the scene shifts, those unusual changes that take place in the twinkling of an eye as the great orchestra drifts from one part of an opera to another, in which scenes, in person, are shown behind the screen and between the long hanging parted curtains.

Of course, all this attention to minute detail requires time and trouble and late nights and perseverance and patience. That is why this man sleeps and lives and finally loves his work. He hasn't time to do anything else. And he wouldn't do anything else if he could.

"There must be atmopshere here," he says, "the same as in a well regulated home. Your visitors at your home don't feel right if they think there is anything strained about the feeling in the home. So we get along here like a great big family; and if I could have entire days and evenings go by without a loud word spoken in the entire theater by one of our employees, it would please me immensely."

There is no doubt about the manner in which the city's largest theater is operated. It stands to-day at the very top in refinement. Those who have not explored its splendid halls and its pretty nooks and its gorgeously appointed little rooms and corners have much yet to see. True, the Statue of Liberty, the Aquarium, the Woolworth Tower and the other sightseeing spots have their appeal and are well worth the seeing. But the Capitol Theater must not be passed by if one is to see the really interesting things of the new New York.

Mr. Rothapfel, first and last, is interested in giving to the public a variety in motion picture programs. He instituted the idea at the Rialto and the Strand. Now, at the Capitol, with more space and more opportunity, he is devoting his entire energies to an expansion along the lines he laid out at the other theaters.

"It is not necessary," he says, "to give the people a program in celluloid. Not at all. In fact, it is necessary, if you would please them most, to give them more. I have operatic selections rendered here by our orchestra that sometimes require weeks in rehearsal. The cheap and make-believe offerings of the comedy stage are entirely done away with, and I try to lift the tone of my theater to the place where it will be enjoyed by the student of music. Our programs require many days of hard work to arrange, and I attempt to so coördinate the different attractions, the opera, the vocal work, the scenics, the artistic color films, the orchestral part and the feature film itself that each will appear necessary and proper to the spectator as he watches the program unfold itself before him.

"The people, I hope, are beginning to realize what is being done for them. Certainly, it will require much time to impress upon all of them just what a high standard we have set. But the time will come when they will realize it."

With the idea in mind that with the further development of the motion picture there will come the development of a new art, he attempts to develop along with that new art a new and equable means of presenting it. One visit to his institution convinces one that he is sparing no effort or time. It is highly worth one's time to see for himself.

Father of Motion Picture "De Luxe"

Samuel L. Rothapfel

In Picture Theaters

ASTOR—"Under Crimson Skies," a Paramount-Jewel photoplay of Central American and South American revolution, with scenes of uprisings in those countries.

BROADWAY—"Up in Mary's Attic," showing the California bathing girls at play on the beaches of the West Coast. The girls appear in person after the film and exhibit bathing costumes of past and present. Specially prepared music and a news and comic reel complete the program.

CAPITOL—Jack London's story, "The Mutiny of the Elsinore," including in the cast Mitchell Lewis, Helen Ferguson, Noah H. Beery jr. and others. A Mack Sennett comedy, "Great Scott," and news reels complete the film program. The Sextet from Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" will head the musical attractions. Special scenic effects. Mendelssohn's "On the Sea" will be played as a prelude to the feature film.

CRITERION—"Humoresque" enters its tenth week of its run at this theater, with changes in music and comic reels.

RIALTO—Enid Bennett in "Hairpins," a Paramount produced by Thomas H. Ince. It was written by C. Gardner Sullivan and directed by Fred Niblo. Matt Moore will be the principal. Rialto orchestra will render special music, and news and comic reels will follow the feature film.

RIVOLI—Alice Brady in "A Dark Lantern," a Realart picture directed by John S. Robertson, written by Elizabeth Robins. The scenario was written by Burns Mantle.

STRAND—"The Jack Knife Man," with a cast including Fred Turner, Harold Todd, Bobby Kelso and Lillian Leighton. A new comedy, a pictorial novelty and the Topical Review. "Babies in Toyland," by the Symphony Orchestra, and an organ solo.

"High Yaller Folk" in "Come Seven"

Earle Foxe and Gail Kane

William Collier Directs Frank Tinney in Comedy Called "Tickle Me"

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perfect unison. Not that they had decided beforehand what they were going to say.

"Go on, Tinney, you do the best talking off stage, all right. But on the stage I've got it all over you."

"This," replied Tinney, "is no place for personalities. Let's see, Willie, what is the name of our production—eh? Oh, yes, 'Tickle Me'—get it?" We nodded and he proceeded. "Selwyn Theater—August 14—just a little more than two weeks. Well—as we were saying"——

And then Tinney finished what the two had started, and his argument ran something like:

"You know what I mean—there's Raymond Hitchcock, Al Jolson, Eddie Foy, all those boys, a score more, I guess I could name—those boys didn't go to college. And, are they successes? Of course, I'm saying nothing about Frank Tinney. But I understand the nearest he ever got to a college was when he delivered groceries to the professor's house in the little old home town.

"The man or woman of the stage to-day who is successful is the one who began when he or she was young and took the knocks as they came. You hear a lot of talk these days about the stage being filled with illiterates and about the general standard of the stage being very low, because of the fact that no college educated men and women are taking the parts. Do you know why that is? It's because the college birds can't get it over, that's all.

"You take a youngster who goes through school, having his bills paid by dad and his food prepared by his mother and his clothes mended by sister at home, and he doesn't have a sense of responsibility and confidence. And, believe me on the stage it's confidence you need."

Collier changed his fat cigar to the other corner of his mouth without touching it with his fingers, shifted to the other foot, nodded "yes," and Tinney went on:

"Don't let these high brows tell you the stage is on the bum and going down faster than the devil, because it isn't. Georgie Cohan might have a word to say about that. The fact is that in our profession (here he raised his eyebrows and Collier sniffed) confidence, as I said before, is the chief requisite."

"Good boy!" growled Collier. "Requisite is very good for a hot night. Proceed."

"Confidence," proceeded Tinney, "is absolutely necessary, and these college grads, with their frat pins cluttering up their lapels that mamma ironed haven't learned the meaning of the word. The stage has gotten along for a good many years with 'home made' actors, and it never was going so well as right now. Don't let these highbinders tell you the comedy and the farce stage is on the decline because of a lack of highbrows in it. Right, Willie?"

"Right!" wheezed Collier.

"Have you——er, I mean, we anything else to say right now," asked Tinney.

"I'm directing the production," came the quick reminder, as the fat cigar stub fell into its original corner.

There was silence.

"And——er," began Tinney, sweeping the orchestra circle with his new straw sailor, I——I am 'Dardanella,' the king of the whole works, and everything else. Remember——Selwyn, Aug. 14, 'Tickle Me.' Au Rivoli! Au Rivoli!"

"Bran mash!" gurgled Collier, sniffing once, "Bran mash!"

Hal Skelly Arrives; Admits Wife "Did It," Despite Stage Lines

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the obvious jokes and the clean jokes.

"Why, I made my first real success simply by coming on the stage in 'Fiddlers Three selling a new patent egg beater out of a bag that I had strapped to my shoulder. They thought that was a funny thing for a great, big fellow like me to be doing, and so I continued to do it, adding a few bright lines as I went along, and soon I became known as the 'egg beater salesman,' and a lot of folk came just to see what in the world an egg-beater salesman would be like on the stage.

"To be successful on the stage, especially in humorous work, one must always remember that he dare not go too much into detail with jokes. The stories and lines must be bright and easily understood and digested. The fellow who takes five minutes to tell his joke nowadays is lost. I give it to them with a snap. That's absolutely necessary. Simplicity and cleanliness on the stage are two things to which we must adhere."

Mr. Skelly's rise from vaudeville to his present high standing as a musical comedy favorite on Broadway is "marvelous" to most of his friends. It was not long ago when he was doing a small act in small-time vaudeville in the West. Always a splendid dancer, he gradually worked East, until at last he was seen by Broadway producers and engaged to do dancing alone, with only a few lines to be spoken. But his ability as a comedian soon made itself evident, and in "Fiddlers Three" and "The Night Boat," in which he had a large part, until he was engaged for "The Girl in the Spotlight," he was one of the featured artists. He made his own way unassisted.

In his present vehicle he is given the widest scope ever undertaken by him, and the receptions, or applause, he receives each night as he makes his first appearance in the piece tell the story.

On all sides, as one sits in the audience at the Knickerbocker Theater these nights, when the comedian walks out upon the stage, one hears whispers, "There's Skelly" and "That's Hal," which is a criterion in theatricals on Broadway. This rise has taken place within the last year and is one of the few real "sudden arrivals" of the season.

Mr. Skelly's appearance alone is a great help to him in his work. A real comedian, he handles himself on the stage in such a dignified manner that he commands respect every minute through which he is working. He mixes his inimitable dancing with his comparatively recently acquired way of producing roars of laughter with his manner of speaking his lines, and the result has placed him in the front rank of entertainers in New York.

There is perhaps no other artist in a Broadway production who has received more telegrams and letters and telephone calls of congratulation of success than Mr. Skelly. The walls of his dressing room at the Knickerbocker Theater are plastered with telegrams, wishing him success and congratulating him upon his work in "The Girl in the Spotlight." They come from throughout the United States. One of these telegrams is from his parents out in Iowa, and this one is placed more prominently than the others, and when you go in to visit with him he will point to it with a smile and say, "That's what makes it worth more than anything else—to have congratulations from the folks at home."

"I am proud, of course," he says, "to be appearing as I am in a production the music for which has been written by Victor Herbert. Mr. Herbert has a way of introducing melodies into a piece of this kind that cannot be duplicated. You've no idea the difference it makes in one's ability to 'put over' his lines when he knows he is backed up by such wonderful music. The different song numbers were made for the piece, and when you hear the orchestra and singers rendering one of his selections, it appears he has written his music for those very persons to play and sing."

There's one other thing he sets aright when speaking of his part in "The Girl in the Spotlight." Throughout the operetta he repeats his "conviction" that "a clever man never marries."

"That's ridiculous," he will tell you seriously. "Say, the fellow who doesn't marry never finds real happiness. I don't mind telling you that Mrs. Skelly was the person who gave me the idea for the "egg beater" stunt that started what little success I have had. As a matter of fact, a man isn't really clever unless he marries. Don't be mistaken about that."

At the New Brighton

Hinda Hand in Hassard Short's "Bleaty-Bleaty"

Hassard Short, Vaudeville Producer, Says Modern Audience Asks Quality

"The day long since has passed when one could take a lot of discarded scenery, a few popular songs, some mediocre players, put them all together and call the result a vaudeville act," declares Hassard Short, actor, author and producer, whose "satirevue," "Bleaty-Bleaty," recently done successfully in the Lambs' Gambol, is to open at the New Brighton Theater to-morrow afternoon. Short is at present both grooming his act for its Brighton opening and staging "Honeydew" for Joe Weber, and his views were expressed while in rehearsal of the latter at the Casino.

"There was a time," he remarked, "when a player who had attained a name in the legitimate could snatch some sketch out of a cobwebbed trunk and take a 'flier' in the two-a-day to capitalize on his renown.

"Now, however, the Broadway star might as well tuck his cognomen into a convenient receptacle and look around for something worth while in which to display his ability, for in vaudeville, as in the $2 houses, 'the play's the thing.' No matter how widely known an actor may be, or how large is his following, he is compelled to undergo the acid test of a trip around the outlying places before he is permitted to show his wares in the metropolitan theaters. I could cite several players of Broadway reputation who had visions of long engagements in the twice daily houses of Greater New York, but they never passed the crisis, which, in most cases, proved to be Jersey City or Yonkers.

"In the case of 'Bleaty-Bleaty' I have worked as thoroughly upon all details of the production as I would upon any legitimate venture. A month of vigorous coaching took place before the fifth and final dress rehearsal was held at the Longacre last week. Now it is going through a series of preliminary performances in Newark and Mount Vernon.

"An entirely new production had to be provided since the presentation at the Lambs and the Hippodrome," the producer continued. "Naturally, girls couldn't wear the clothes of the Lambs impersonators, so exactly one hundred new costumes were made for the cast of twenty-five persons. We carry a musical director and a working crew, of five men, and for the first time in vaudeville twenty-five 'baby spots' and our own switchboard, providing an electrical equipment as complete as that of the average Broadway musical production.

"This is highly essential, as, after all," he declared, "lighting and colors are of primary importance. Motion pictures have the lights, but the color is lacking, and as one admires a pretty girl for her coloring as much as anything, that phase of production must be given the attention that is its due. With proper light effects one can make cheesecloth look like chiffon.

"The settings in 'Bleaty-Bleaty,' twelve in all, are impressionistic. I believe in utilizing scenery as they did in Shakespeare's day—merely as a background. With artistic hangings 'props' can be employed to fully carry out one's ideas. Gaudy canvases kill the effect of costumes."

At the Strand Theater

Florence Vidor in "The Jack-Knife Man"

King Vidor's New Film, 'Jack-Knife Man,' Praised By Author of 'Pigs Is Pigs'

New York motion picture patrons are going to be given the opportunity this week, if all predictions come true, of seeing in King Vidor's "The Jack-Knife Man," the six reel feature at the Strand Theater, something novel in photoplay production, and an example of what the twenty-six-year-old producer believes is to be the ultimate trend in all high class picture production. That is, simplicity with art, and an abandonment of the sex play, the cheap and tawdry "flash" film that for a long time has taken a great part in the field of motion picture production.

"The Jack-Knife Man," which is an adaptation from the widely read novel by Ellis Parker Butler, "Pigs Is Pigs," has been praised warmly by producers who have seen the private showings of the film. Mr. Butler himself has written to the producer that the picture is entirely satisfactory to him and that he believes "it is going to be one of the most successful productions." He concludes his letter by saying he is proud to have his name connected with the picture.

The picture will open to-day for a week's run at the Strand.